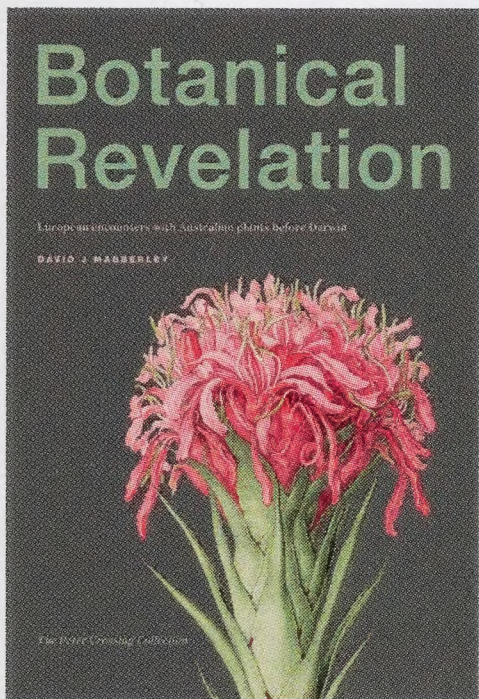


Review



Botanical revelation: European encounters with Australian plants before Darwin. By D. J. MABBERLEY. 2020. NewSouth Books, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. 384 pp. ISBN 978-1742236476 (hardcover). Price \$89.99.

David J. Mabberley, in his new tome, *Botanical Revelation: European encounters with Australian plants before Darwin*, thoroughly examines this fascinating period of time in botanical history with the accompaniment of numerous remarkable drawings and prints of original texts never before shared with the public. The cover of this stunning work is a beautiful reproduction of a *Doryanthes excelsa* Corrêa (Gynea Lily) engraving by Ferdinand Bauer from 1826, with the inside of the jacket revealing an intriguing 19th-century map of New South Wales and the Australian continent. This book is an indispensable addition to any professional library or serious collector of botanical books.

Botanical Revelation is the result of comprehensive and detailed research, as seen in the heavily referenced text. Using historical accounts, primary literature, illustrations, and herbarium specimens found in the Peter Crossing Library, Mabberley presents a history of the Australian flora in a new way, illuminating the interplay between European exploration and fascination with Australian plants and its inevitable influence on European gardens, art, and economics pre-Darwin.

In chronological order starting with the first Australian plant record from 1606, Mabberley outlines a rich history of those who journeyed to Australia (from the well known to the obscure), the voyage route and details, what the explorers, scientists, and others learned from their experiences, and the influences on culture and science once the discoveries were disseminated across Europe. Paralleling these captivating histories is a thorough historical treatise on European botanical artists and

gardeners, an illuminating art form of its own that is oftentimes overlooked.

Mabberley's inclusion of historical context, such as stating that Bruni D'Entrecasteaux reached Tasmania two days before Louis XVI was executed and that the king was said to have inquired about news of the voyage on his way to the guillotine, as well as other intriguing facts, adds to the readability of the narrative. Through such anecdotes, he shows how flora brought Australia to the forefront of global significance at a time when Europe dominated.

Describing the rise of nurseries and botanical periodicals, *Botanical Revelation* details lines from original text such as William Townsend Aiton's 1814 *Epitome of the second edition of Hortus Kewensis* (that Mabberley describes as "oily"), stating the printing of this information as "necessary to the public" and that the patronage of the king "has rendered Botany a favourite pursuit among all the classes of Your Majesty's people." By sharing this historical perspective, Mabberley helps the reader gain a sense of the political and social climate in which these events occurred. Interspersed into this robust narrative are comprehensive sidebars highlighting specific Australian plant species, typically including vibrantly colored illustrations or engravings, ethnobotanical information, and either the history of their European discovery or other compelling facts about the species' spread to the greenhouses and gardens of Europe.

Mabberley's extensive background affords him the expertise and knowledge to create this impressive book, successfully illustrating connections between art, history, philosophy, natural science, and culture. He ends the book by putting forth the mysteries yet to be discovered in the floristic world, in Australia and elsewhere, and writes of the significance of botanical illustration in documenting diversity as well as the importance of curiosity and continued exploration.

If you are intrigued by Australian plants, beautiful botanical art, the history of flora, scientific discovery, the economic implications of plants throughout the eras, or the history behind Darwin's theory of evolution in intricate detail, then you will find a gem in *Botanical Revelation*.

—DENA PAOLILLI AND MATT RITTER, Biological Sciences Department, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407.